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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, March 31, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "GOING--GOING--GONE!" Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Have you heard of the wonderful one-hoss shay,
.....
It went to pieces all at once,
All at once, and nothing first,
Just as bubbles do when they burst.

Homemakers, I am very much afraid that if Oliver Wendell Holmes were here today, he would take a look at some of the farm homes and farm buildings in our countryside, shake his head, and begin writing a similar poem about farmhouses that may "go to pieces all at once,- all at once, and nothing first, just as bubbles do when they burst."

For I have it on no less authority than the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering that few people realize that since 1920, repairs, remodeling, and new construction for farm buildings has been far from making up for normal depreciation. Many structures must be repaired at once or they will soon be as worthless as the wonderful one-hoss shay. Many have deteriorated to such an extent that they are beyond repair.

I believe it is up to some of us women to get the members of the family to look squarely at the situation and cooperate to keep a roof over their heads- literally, and no joking. The Bureau of Agricultural Engineering recently worked with the Universities of Wisconsin, Georgia and Illinois, and the Kansas State Agricultural College to make a survey of farm buildings in typical areas. They wanted to find out what their general condition is today, what repairs and improvements are needed, and what farmers are doing about it. The survey included the farmhouse itself, barns, poultry houses and sheds, grain and feed storage buildings, hot houses, brooder houses, garages, and other miscellaneous buildings.

The observations of these investigators directly concern any of you who live in one of these 4 States- Wisconsin, Georgia, Illinois and Kansas- but they are also indicative of the condition of farm buildings all over the country. The survey shows that 68.4 percent of the Wisconsin farms visited, 73.9 percent of those in Kansas, and 42 percent of the Georgia farms have homes that are 31 years old or over- an age at which depreciation often goes on very rapidly if not checked. Barns and other buildings are not quite so old as the farmhouses they belong to, but many of these structures ought to be repaired at once or they will soon be worthless.

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This is a pretty serious situation. In some degree it may apply to every one of you who are listening at this moment. Put in another way, while all houses and farm buildings depreciate normally from year to year, the rate of depreciation can be slowed down by good maintenance, just as constant care, watchfulness, and careful use check depreciation of an automobile. If a farmhouse is build to last 60 years and house 2 generations, it may be assumed to depreciate less than 2 percent a year. With good care it may easily serve the family much longer. But if, when it is only 30 years old, it is ready to fall to pieces, depreciation has gone on at a very rapid rate, and the money invested in it by the owner is used up at least twice as fast as it should have been.

The surveys in these four States also showed that despite an increase in farm income, the expenditures for improvements made in these areas during 1936 were not sufficient even to cover current depreciation, much less repair the effects of the neglect of the past 17 years. Perhaps one of the facts brought out in a recent consumer-purchasing study throws light on this: Did you know that next to food, expenditures for automobiles for family use take the largest portion of the farm family income? Are we justified in wondering whether these families have been more interested in rolling along over the countryside than they have in fixing up their homes to make them weather-tight, warm, comfortable and in good condition- to save them to live in during the years to come?

Another point these surveys in Kansas, Wisconsin, Georgia and Illinois brought out was that the type and size of structures needed on farms has changed considerably in many sections of the country. For example, in the Kansas township surveyed, farms there have increased in size since wheat proved a more dependable crop than corn, alfalfa and livestock. The type of crops grown has changed in other cases and yields per acre of many crops have increased since the buildings were constructed. As a result there is great need for replacement or remodelling of many of the older buildings.

I hope every one of you, before your next outing in the family car, will take to heart that good old adage, "Sightseeing begins at home." Take a notebook and pencil and go systematically over the house from chimney to basement. Note the structural repairs that ought to be attended to, and the small defects that will soon become big ones if not immediately cared for. To paraphrase another old saw, "A patch in time saves nine," and if it is needed at a point which is out of reach for the housekeeper, she can surely induce the men and boys of the family to do something about it, once they understand that depreciation is wasteful and costly.

Spring also brings that perennial urge to paint, and this is one of the best means of stopping depreciation. Whatever part of the country you live in, this is the time of year to stop, look, and get something done about the house before it's too late. Your Extension Service will help you if you ask for practical suggestions.
